

Sermon Text for September 7, 2014

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Jeremiah 1:4-10, James 5:1-11

“Called in Christ’s service”

I feel like I need to prepare you for our Scripture today. It is a very strongly worded chastisement against a group of people and then an encouragement using that same group of people as role models. Especially after last week where close to half of you let us know either how are involved in the life of the church or how you would like to be involved in the life of the church. I would hate to have you think we were ungrateful in any way.

Once again the theme of James comes screaming back at us. This theme that reminds us that our faith has to have some impact upon our actions so how we live our lives has to reflect what we believe. The examples that James uses to get across his point today during this harvest season is a an example of a famer and his workers and he doesn’t have many nice things to say especially in the first six verses. But then he softens up a bit on the last verses from 7-11. Again, I didn’t choose these verses, but I guess I didn’t skip them either. Let’s read.

READ

I had a hard time figuring out what I was thinking those few months ago when I came up with my sermon topics. For the OT reading the theme of called in Christ’s service was evident how it was able to be applied. Not so much the New Testament reading, so let’s start off with the OT. The call of Jeremiah to be a prophet is classic. He says, I am not worthy to be your spokesperson, actually I’m not even qualified, I’m too young. We don’t know how old he actually was, 15, 22, or 46. Who knows? But the point is that Jeremiah didn’t feel like he was capable of serving the Lord or being called in His service.

But God answers: I have made you worthy. If I have called you to work for me I will give you everything you need and I will make you worthy. All I have needed the Lord hath provided. So we begin our lesson today by being reminded in Jeremiah of God’s great faithfulness, and that morning by morning we can see new mercies and these mercies provide all that we need to serve the Lord.

The connection we are able to make to James is that while we have no excuse for not serving the Lord, not age, not time, not money, and that all that we have needs to be used for the service of the Lord. James focuses on this fact with a bit of a different emphasis.

You can break down James into 2 very different sections. Verses 1-6 addresses farmers and their treatment of their workers as a result of their single emphasis on earning money.

Verses 7-11 focuses on the example of the patience that is exhibited by farmers as they plant and watch their crops grow.

Let's look at the first six verses. The rich are systematically condemned, they aren't being called to repentance at all, but rather being chastised for their hoarding of material goods at the expense of the workers of their fields and specifically the wages of the workers of their fields. It isn't a minimum wage problem or that they aren't being paid a fair wage, but rather that they were not being paid at all.

When we were in Russia the Bolshoi Theater was being remodeled from the time we arrived until the month before we left. The reason it took 5 years to finish the remodel was because the state would hire workers for 6 months or so from China or the Caucasus or the former Soviet republics, they would work for 6 months or so, maybe a year and gradually stop paying them until the workers refused to work, then they would ship them all out and bring in new people to work and the cycle would continue again. I so hear the words of James addressed in this situation.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 gives the framework for the farmer on how to pay the workers. This is from Deuteronomy now: "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land or in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them, otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you and you will incur guilt." This sounds a lot like James doesn't it? There are very clear directives on how the workers are to be paid, so why would anyone do anything different?

James actually tells us why and gives us a very specific reason why. When our focus and attention is on monetary gain, whether it be the corn and the grain that rots or the clothes that we have closets full in our homes which can be consumed by moth, or investments that increase until we lose them all, if that is our focus then we will lose our desire and our heart for those who have the ear of the Lord, the poor and the oppressed. When we start to see making money as the most important thing in our life then we begin to treat others in a way that makes it obvious that the Lord is not calling the shots. Verse 4 is very specific when it states that those who have mowed your fields and have not been paid cry out to the Lord and their cries have reached Almighty God.

Why would God care about the nobodies of this world, as opposed to those who have the power and the wealth and make the decisions for the people? He just does, because somehow throughout history he has had a better relationship and seems to work better with people who are

oppressed and persecuted and poor, he has found them to be more willing to do his service than those whose focus is on continued success in the eyes of the world at the expense of success in the eyes of God.

Amos 8:4-7 tells the story that is reflected in all of Scripture.

Again, for some reason the farmer is lifted up as the one who needs to beware. James stresses the incredible responsibility that we all have when it comes to our wealth. We have to use it for the service of the Lord or else it becomes our master and we strive for those things which do not reflect our faith.

The purpose is so that the community of faith can be built up. You see James saw the importance which he borrowed from the OT of the church being a community where even the material goods of each had to contribute to the well being of all. That was part of the responsibility that comes with wealth. The story of Annanias and Sapphira reflects that as they not only lied to the HS but they also kept what God had given them in material goods away from the community so all suffered.

James' example of how not to do things becomes clear in the first 6 verses, but then once we get to verse 7 he suddenly shifts to the example of the good farmer. We move away from the castigation and damnation of the wealthy to the example of the patient who happens to be the farmer. 5 times these verses use the word patient so we can assume that this is the central theme. He describes someone who is patient by using the example of the farmer. A farmer knows that once the seed is planted that there is a certain period of time that it takes before you can benefit from its fruit. James tells us that God is at work throughout that whole time even if we don't see anything happening on the top of the soil, things are happening to ensure that the plants come up healthy. God is at work down there.

God is at work in our lives, and it takes time sometimes before we see any results at all.

Jeremiah knew what it meant to have that kind of patience. James mentions the prophets who understood what it meant to be persecuted and yet were able to be patient even in the face of that persecution. I think James was speaking specifically about Jeremiah. Jeremiah never saw any results at all for all that he planted in his ministry. When he uses the example of the farmer he states that only were they patient, but they didn't grumble. I don't know, I've heard some farmers grumble, but James' point is that when things get tough for a farmer, tell me if this is right, then they don't grumble, they band together. A barn burns down and they all gather to get a new one back up. Someone is sick and needs their hay cut, it gets cut. A loved one passes away and the tobacco has to be speared and it gets speared.

The farmer understands that family and community extend far beyond the walls of the house and far beyond any blood lines.

What a great example for the church. Patience needs to be calling card of the church even in the face of injustice, James also uses the example of Job as someone who persevered in the difficult times. Boy, he sure stuck in there and kept the faith, but I'm not sure he was exactly patient. He cried out to the Lord, he was certain he would be vindicated, he made statements that expressed his strong desire for his vindication to come and to come soon.

The example James doesn't give us is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith Jesus Christ. He does tell us to be patient for his coming, but he is a tremendous example of someone who was patient even in the face of abandonment and torture. He continues to be, what is that James says in verse 11, compassionate and merciful. Jesus is our ultimate example. A student of Aristotle once said I really dislike you because when I spend time with you I see who I am. The implication was that he didn't like who he was.

Jesus shows us who we truly are, and the incredible thing is that Jesus still wants us for his service. These verses have a little something for everyone. No one can say they are not able to serve for any reason. If we are wealthy then we need to beware that our hunt for money take the place of our desire to serve the Lord and shade our decisions to oppress and turn our back on the poor.

If we are poor then we can take consolation in that God is calling us to be patient. God promises to deliver. But no matter where we find ourselves on that spectrum, we are all called to Christ's service. Amen.